

THE HISTORY OF ECCLESIASTICAL
ARCHITECTURE IN ENGLAND.*
THE SEVERAL INFLUENCES WHICH CONTRIBUTED
TO FORM GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE.

To express the difficulty of certifying the date of an invention, we might repeat a trite proverb—"that there is nothing new under the sun;" and architecture forms no exception to the applicability of the saying. We particularise the present period for poverty of invention, and not entirely without reason, but we forget how few are the years over which our observation has extended, compared with those in which gradual progress was at length consummated in the works which we admire. As we still practise those methods of construction which were described by Vitruvius near two thousand years ago, so the elements of the art are found in the very infancy of time. And as we can retrace the changes of style, and note the influence of nation upon nation, so the wonderful beauty of the Gothic cathedral was not altogether the work of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries; and so, even the Saxon style was the offshoot of another.—We might, indeed, have traced the spire to the Saxon period, from the illuminations of Caedmon's paraphrase.

From the degenerate architecture of the Roman empire—imitated, in its several relinquished provinces, or subsequently, as we have seen, from recollections of the "eternal city"—sprang the various phases of architecture in Europe.

But the architecture *more Romano* was composed of styles which merely indicated the common origin. The architecture of the Saxons, and the style which was introduced by Edward the Confessor, had many striking features of dissimilarity. With all its reliance to a common origin, the style of the Normans was essentially that of a different race, and it infused not only new elements but new vigour into the architectural efforts of the country. The most characteristic decorations of pointed architecture—of the early period at least—were suggested in Norman buildings; whilst those structural elements which we have noticed during the Saxon period, were more fully developed, and, generally, the several influences which contributed to form the pointed style, are to be observed in the durable works of the Normans, and not mainly to be gleaned from written chronicles.

The science of masonry has never been carried to greater perfection than during the period of pointed architecture; and the period of the Norman style is thus important, if considered merely as that of the education of the English masons. The zeal and enterprise of those who raised our cathedrals may astonish all; the beauty of the arrangement of flying buttresses and groining may delight the artist; but the rich embroidery of the roof of Henry the Seventh's chapel is merely the encrustation of a wonderful design for the adjustment of stones, towards which the first steps were taken during the Norman period.

In the great influence of continental architecture over that of this country—in which resulted the importation of the most characteristic features of the pointed style—we discover another effect of the Norman invasion.—But other influences towards the establishment of the architectural works of a later period, have to be enumerated. Of these were the very defects of construction—such as did exist, notwithstanding the merit of the Norman works compared with those which preceded them. In the extensive reparation which has taken place at Hereford, and in the accident which befel the nave of that building, we have had recent evidence of that imperfection of Norman masonry, to which we owe the earlier ruin of other important buildings. Thus from this cause alone—although in the twelfth century there were an immense number of churches and religious establishments—and excluding from consideration that continual desire to contribute to the splendour of the religious edifice, which occasioned continual changes in buildings—were produced many beautiful works, amongst which the lantern at Ely may be particularly cited.—It is perhaps to a similar want of constructive skill that we must attribute the frequent absence of groined roofs of Norman date; and the fate which has so constantly followed the cathedral

at York, in which even the groining has always been of wood, attended many noble structures. But to such causes as these we owe the works which rose from their ashes.

The most important influence over the forms of Gothic architecture—referable to this period—is one of which we scarcely think Mr. Poole has taken sufficient notice. The crusades may indeed have given to Europe the pointed arch itself, and though it may be objected that, as the form is found in buildings which are not Gothic, it is not sufficient to constitute a distinct style, it remained, throughout, an inseparable element, lasting even after the principle of verticality was absorbed in the rectangular character, and being retained in arcuated forms in tracery, when abandoned in the circumscribing outline of the aperture.—It is not our purpose to pursue the inquiry into the question of the origin of the form, to justify the opinion of Sir Christopher Wren, or to revive the ingenious theory of Milner, any more than to resuscitate the picturesque fancies of Sir James Hall, respecting the origin of the style itself. All that we now show is, that in the Norman period of English history, and of the progress of architecture, we may find sufficient evidence for a certain amount of reliance upon such theories.—The effect of the crusades upon the structural arrangement of churches was important, if only from the influence of the model of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the theory of the eastern origin of the pointed arch is still that which presents the greatest amount of probability. With the Norman style the pointed arch was long co-existent; it was transmitted from the continental to the insular possessions of the Normans; but it was a form with which the English crusader was already familiar, and which had been apparent in the intersecting arches of the Norman style. And what palmer or knight, however much under the influence of the religious fervour of that remarkable age, could see "the land of the east" without deriving some impressions of the beauties of nature, from which our closet life "in cities pent" too much removes us. The carved ornaments and capitals of the Early English period have not, perhaps, the faithful adherence to natural forms which is observed in a later style; but they have so great a resemblance to well-known plants, that there can be no doubt as to their evidence of an awakened perception of natural beauties; whilst the still conventional mode in which they are treated, recalls the architecturalised treatment of foliage, which the Normans derived, along with even the Corinthian capital itself, from the Roman style.

Considered as the period of the introduction of heraldry, the crusades are equally important: for between this science and Gothic architecture there has always been a very intimate connection. It would be erroneous to suppose that this connection subsisted mainly in that period when armorial bearings formed the principal sculptured decoration of buildings,—when the rose, the portcullis, and the fleur-de-lis, were planted in every imaginable position, and when the religious principle which is believed to have chiefly inspired the monumental architecture of the middle ages, was most obtrusively impaired by trappings and mementoes of social strife—which were intruded upon the sleep of death—or by the assertion of high lineage in the equality of the tomb. That the connection of architecture and heraldry was more subtle and intimate, is evidenced by the remarkable parallelism which may be observed in their progress. The shield was not only in constant use as an architectural decoration, but its form altered with that of the arch. Architecture and heraldry—each had a symbolical meaning, and the symbols which they employed were often the same. "But," according to Mr. Poole, "the great bond of union was the religious element. In theory every knight was a faithful and devoted Christian; in theory every architect was a servant of the living God. The knight received his arms and his banner at the hands of the Church, after prayer and vigil; and the rules of his order, and his vow of chivalry, were full of religious requirements and promises. And the arms which he received from the Church he desired, at his last day, to suspend over his monument, in pious acknow-

ledgment that he had received them from God, that he had kept them unsullied by God's grace, and that he was permitted to offer them again to God in thankfulness and honour. And so with the architect and his work. The church was an offering, in the heart, and from the heart of all concerned,—the founder, the architect, the artisans."

But symbolism most deeply pervaded the architecture of the middle ages, and however little we may countenance the opinions of some who would see in Durandus the highest authority in ART, we are forced to admit, with Mr. Poole, that all who do not depart greatly from the forms of Gothic architecture—and of such there are few—"must still design their churches with submission to several laws which have no basis but that of symbolism." Our author, in his definition of intended symbolism, rejects the aspiring characteristic of the mediæval church; but he carefully excludes the application of symbolic meaning from details which there is no proof were ever accepted as symbolical, and does not convert the moral reflections of Durandus into legitimate interpretations. Symbolism, however, was of the greatest importance in determining the peculiar character of pointed architecture. We might, indeed, have discovered its germination during the Saxon period,—in the recognition of the principle of orientation,—in the division into nave and aisles—symbolic of the Trinity—and that into nave and chancel, and in at least the existence of the cruciform arrangement. But in the Norman period symbolism was fully developed. The richness of the doorways was not merely æsthetic, and suggestive of similar depth and richness at later periods. It was the distinctive principle of the Norman architect to present "the decorated face of every portion of the church to the advancing spectator;" and this—most completely expressed in the Norman style—was certainly a most marked characteristic of pointed architecture.

It is not our purpose here to enumerate all the component elements of pointed architecture, any more than we are able to touch upon the multitude of forms in which these found expression. We might, indeed, point out that the arts of sculpture and painting, in their several branches, were never more indissolubly interwoven with the whole conception of a style, than during the mediæval period, notwithstanding that it has been urged against the revival of the style, that it can give no scope for the exercise of these arts.—We might, too, have enumerated, amongst other influences, dating from an early period, that of veneration for the patron saint, such as led to entire changes of the structure of particular buildings, and consequent most important influences upon style. Thus we might instance the venerated memory of Edward the Confessor, which occasioned the erection of the entire new building of Westminster Abbey,—a work most important in the history of architecture, from the circumstance that it is believed to give the earliest date of the introduction of the tracery principle.—The bishops of the Saxon and Norman periods became the venerated saints of the later church, the reputation of martyrs brought wealth to their shrines, and the edifice increased in splendour, though at length its structural harmony was interfered with.

But it is impossible to exclude from predisposing influences the existence of the guild of Freemasons, by which that remarkable uniformity of detail in structures of the same age was communicated from one locality to another. At the same time, as Mr. Poole well observes, this uniformity is often exaggerated, although he might have added to his discrimination of national peculiarities the distinctive characteristics of more minute divisions of style, such as are observable in the works of different counties. Some of these may have arisen from difference of materials, but in other particulars, the churches of one locality are distinct from those of another of the same date.

It would be wrong, indeed, to ascribe that importance to the Freemasons which has been given to them by popular consent. That it was held an honour to belong to the craft, that their influence over the art was great, and that their mysteries contained many of the principles for which modern investigators are busily engaged in searching, seems obvious; but that

* Continued from page 111.